

Foreign Countries

by: Carl H. Claudy

Our ancient operative brethren desired to become Masters so that, when they traveled in foreign countries, they could still practice their craft. Speculative Freemasons still desire to “travel in foreign countries” and study their craft that they may receive such instruction as will enable them to do so, and when traveling, to receive a Master’s Wages.

But the “Foreign Countries” do not mean to us the various geographical and political divisions of the Old World, nor do we use the Word we learn as a means of identification to enable us to build material temples and receive coin of the realm for our labor. “Foreign Countries” is to us a symbol.

Like all the rest of the symbols, it has more than one interpretation; but, unlike many, none of these is very difficult to trace or understand.

Freemasonry itself is the first “foreign country” in which the initiate will travel; a world as different from the familiar workaday world, as France is different from England, or Belgium from Greece. Everything is different in the Masonic world; the standards are different, the “Money” is different, the ideas are different. In the familiar world, money, place and power are the standards by which we judge our fellows. In the fraternity all are on the level, and there are neither rich nor poor. In the world outside there are laws to prevent, and police and penalties to enforce obedience; in the fraternity the laws are not “thou shalt not” but “thou shalt” and the fundamental of them all is the golden rule, the law of brotherly love. Men conform to the laws of Freemasonry not because they must but because they will. Surely such a land is a “foreign country” to the stranger within its borders; and the visitor must study it, learn its language and its customs, if he is to enjoy it.

Many learn but a few phrases and only enough of its customs to conform. There are thousands of Americans who went all over France during the war with a pack of cigarettes, a friendly smile and “no comprende!” as their sole knowledge of the language; but did they learn to know France? A Lodge member may know the words of the opening and closing and how to act in a lodge, learn to call his fellows “brother” and pay his dues; but will that get him all there is in the foreign country in which he finds him-self?

America north and south is a mighty continent . . . It has many countries. To know one is not to know all. The man at home in Mexico will find Newfoundland strange, and the Canadian will not feel at home in Chile if he knows nothing of that country.

So it is with the vast continent of Freemasonry. It has many “foreign countries within it; and he is the wise and happy Freemason who works patiently at the pleasant task of visiting and studying them. There are the foreign countries of philosophy, of jurisprudence and of history. No Freemason is really worthy of the name who does not understand something of how his new land is governed, of what it stands for and why.

And there is the foreign country of Symbolism of which this little book is far less a guide than a gateway.

As a Master Mason, a man has the right to travel in all the foreign countries of Freemasonry. There is none to say him nay. If he will but "learn the work" and keep himself in good standing, he may visit where he will. But it is not within the door of other lodges than his own that he will find the boundary line and the guide posts of those truly Masonic "Foreign Countries" to which he has been given the passport by his brethren. He will find gateways to those lands in the library, in the study club, in books and magazines; and, most and best of all, in the quiet hour alone, when what he has read and learned comes back to him to be pondered over and thought through. The "foreign country" of symbolism has engaged the thoughtful and serious consideration of hundreds of able Masonic students, as has that of the history of our Order. Not to visit them both; aye, not to make oneself a citizen of them both, is to refuse the privileges one has sought and labored to obtain. One asks for a petition, prays one's friend to take it to his lodge, knocks on the door, takes obligations, works to learn and finally receives the Master's Degree. One receives it, struggles for it, hopes for it . . . why? That one may travel in the far lands and receive the reward there awaiting. .

Then why hesitate? Why wait? Why put it off? Why allow others to pass on and gain; while one stands, the gate open, the new land beckoning, and all the Masonic world to see?

That is the symbolism of the "foreign countries" . . . that is the meaning of the phrase which once meant, to operative Masons, exactly what it says. To the Freemason who reads it a right it is a clarion call to action, to study, to an earnest pressing forward on the new highway. For time is short and the night cometh when no man can work!

To the young Freemason, particularly, is the symbol a ringing appeal. To those who are old in the Craft, who have set their pace, determined their course and become satisfied with all they have managed to learn of the fraternity, with what little they have been able to take from it, "foreign countries" means countries which are foreign and nothing more. But to the young man just starting out as a Freemason . . . Oh, my brother, heed you the symbolism of the phrase and make your entry through the gateway, your limbs strong to travel, your mind open to learn. For if you truly travel in the Masonic foreign countries, you will receive Master's Wages beyond your greatest expectations. The way is open to the Freemason; not an easy way, perhaps, or a short way, but a clear way. Not for the old Mason, the man set in his ways, the man content with the literal meaning of the words, the "book Mason," the pin-wearer, not for them the foreign countries of symbolism, and Masonic knowledge.

But you, you who are new, you to whom Freemasonry is yet a wonder and a vision. a mystery and a glory . . . for you the gate is wide, for you the path is clear; for you the foreign countries beckon . . . hang you not back!

For at the end of the journey, when the last foreign country of Freemasonry has been traveled and learned and loved, you shall come to a new gate, above which there is a new name written . . . and when you have read it you will know the True Word of a Master Mason.